



Once More Unto the Breach

Thoughts on the edge of the breach: The war on terrorism is proceeding, albeit not at the pace that some would like, and for others, too fast. At times, I reminisce about the old days during the Cold War when we knew who the enemy was and how we would defend against any acts of aggression. I can remember the days spent defending the Fulda Gap from a possible Soviet attack on the edge of the forest near Hunfield, discussing the order of battle with my platoon leaders and platoon sergeants, listening to the boasting about how many T-62s, BMPs and BRDMs we could annihilate once the attack moved into our sector, and having steadfast confidence in our soldiers and equipment. Looking back, defending the GDP seemed easy. We knew our enemy and how he would fight. Today's tasks for our Armed Forces are much more complicated. Are we up to the challenge? Initial success from Afghanistan indicates we are a trained and powerful force capable of fighting and winning.

When I was a second lieutenant, my tank platoon was responsible for the maintenance of a Tank Table VIII range (back then we didn't have high-speed computers and civilian-contracted ranges, and a tank company operated, fired, and maintained its own tank ranges). The day firing concluded, my platoon headed downrange and serviced the targets, refueled the generators, and pieced together the shot-up thermal panels. All seemed to be in good order, and we waited for nightfall. As the sun went down and the moon appeared, the time for going "hot" and putting steel on target was on.

Unfortunately, none of the targets cooperated. As we were looking through the thermal sights and trying to lift targets with the Saab devices, nothing appeared. Minutes turned into hours and the battalion commander became rather impatient with this delay. He was firing his tank on this night. To make a long story short, the battalion commander and I crossed paths on a dusty tank trail in the midst of Blackwell Range, where he vociferously proceeded to rip into me. I quickly accepted the responsibility, even though many things were beyond my control, and he held me accountable to fix the problems and get the range hot. Luckily, I had some great NCOs who knew how to apply some quick fixes, and shortly after midnight we had first round downrange.

The moral of this story is too often no one accepts responsibility. Recently, we have all witnessed our share of individuals laying blame at someone else's feet or shirking responsibility, or worse, blaming the system for failures. The Army is fortunate to have values and systems in place to account for individuals who violate those values.

This issue's cover is a tribute to the soldiers from the 194th Tank Battalion. This National Guard unit was organized in 1941 at Fort Lewis, Washington, and made up of National Guard tank companies from Minnesota, Missouri, and California, and deployed to the Philippines months prior to Pearl Harbor. Almost 52 years ago, these men were part of the first unit to fight against the Japanese during WWII in the Philippines. This pivotal battle for the Philippines was the first combat in the Pacific Theater during World War II to see tank-verses-tank action. Understrengthed, out equipped, and with no hope of reinforcements, these brave men fought a valiant fight for 5 months before surrendering.

Winning the counterreconnaissance fight continues to be an Achilles' heel for our combat units. Major Samuel Butzbach and Captain Charles Lombardo offer recommendations that will better prepare a unit to succeed at this crucial task. Their article provides some excellent tips on how a unit should prepare and execute the counterrecon fight.

SFC Michael Clemens offers first-hand knowledge of how the Armor soldier assignments process works. As one of the professional development NCOs at Armor Branch, he discusses the factors that influence personnel assignments.

One final note for all you subscribers, a quick scan of the current subscriber list indicates there are many of you who have changed locations this summer and have not updated your address. I can't get the post office to deliver your latest edition if you don't update your address. Please e-mail, fax, or send in your change of address. Believe it or not, I get charged from the post office for undeliverable magazines.

Enjoy! I look forward to reading your comments.

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